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"CULTURE MATTERS: HOW VALUES SHAPE HUMAN PROGRESS"
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION WITH
LAWRENCE E. HARRISON

CCFPD

October 6, 2000
Ottawa

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During his recent visit to Ottawa, Lawrence Harrison (Academy for International and Area Studies, Harvard University) was invited by Hugh Stephens (Assistant Deputy Minister, DFAIT) to discuss a book he co-edited with Samuel Huntington, ***Culture Matters – How Values Shape Human Progress*** *(Basic Books, June 2000). The participants at the hour-long meeting included academics, NGOs, and government officials: Errol Mendes (Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa), Daniel Osabu-Kle (Carleton University), Madonna Larbi (Match International Centre), Josette Couture (Canadian Heritage), Jill Sinclair (Global and Human Issues Bureau, DFAIT), Lorenz Friedlaender (Policy Planning, DFAIT), and Julie Rechel, the organiser. The following is a brief synopsis of the presentation and discussion.*

1. Presentation

Lawrence Harrison proposed that the unsatisfactory progress of humankind toward prosperity and political pluralism during the past half century may be a function of cultural values and attitudes. Colonialism (imperialism) and dependency are no longer viable explanations for poverty and authoritarianism, he argued. As well, exceptions to geographic and climate explanations (determinism) abound (i.e., tropical Singapore, Hong Kong, etc.). This shift in thinking is epitomised by Enrique Fernado Cardoso's ideological transformation from a foremost Latin American dependency theorist to a proponent of free market policies as Brazil's Minister of Finance, and the enthusiastic support of (formerly sceptical) Mexico for NAFTA. The weight of the dependency school is on the decline even in Africa where more people seem to express the view that colonisers can not be blamed for the Continent's travails forever. In a similar vein, Harrison proposed that racism and discrimination are no longer satisfactory explanations for minority underachievement in the United States. Culture, he went on to say, may be the key to why certain ethnic groups "do better" relative to others.

Drawing attention to Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber, as the intellectual precursors of the cultural interpretation of development, Harrison outlined key factors which, he suggests, determine whether a culture is progress-resistant or progress-prone. They include time focus, agency, approach to work, and other factors (presented in the table below). Therefore, for any society to develop, it has to reject its progress-resistant practices and characteristics. Harrison drew attention to a "spontaneous initiative" to transform the progress-resistant culture of Peru (where a Peruvian established a "progressive" school, teaching the "10 Commandments of Development"). However, he remains sceptical about the practical steps actors located in progress-prone societies should take to aid the (supposed) necessary cultural transformation of

their backward counterparts.

Determinants of Progress	**Characteristics of Progress-resistant cultures**	**Characteristics of Progress-prone cultures**
time focus	dwell on their (often glorified) past	look to the future (optimistically)
agency	fatalism accompanied by resignation is wide-spread	individuals believe they can influence their destiny
approach to work	work is not highly valued	work is highly valued
value of education	perceived relatively less important	perceived crucial
perceptions about career/success	reliance on nepotism is wide-spread	merit is the key to success
frugality	often perceived as a threat to equality	highly valued
view of competition	often perceived as aggression	perceived as source of excellence
trust	family or clan-based	extends beyond a family to encompass democratic institutions and "political" community
notion of justice	reliance on cult and religious beliefs	reliance on rigorous (and institutionalised) ethical codes
authority	centralised and vertical	dispersed and horizontal
relationship between the state and religion	theocracy	secular state

2. Discussion

Some points made by the participants during the discussion included:

- Errol Mendes (University of Ottawa) pointed out that there exists a myriad of exceptions to the generalisations put forward by the cultural determinism theories. The diversity of attitudes and believes within each society discredits their validity as well. He drew attention to India, where characteristics Harrison associates with progress-prone cultures (i.e., frugality, understanding of the value of education, etc.) exist, yet India remains "undeveloped." In a similar vein, Japan is known to dwell on its glorified past – a characteristic Harrison assigns to the progress-resistant cultures, yet it is a member of the G-7. Culture, therefore, is an inadequate tool in evaluating the lack of "progress." Other, more universal theories, have to be called upon to explain the uneven development around the world. John McDowell (DFAIT) pointed to the economic (and, to some extent, cultural) differences within Canadian regions settled by the British, adding further

doubt to the equation between a country's culture and poverty (or underdevelopment).

- Daniel Osabu-Kle (Carleton University) expressed his concern about revisiting the now debunked modernisation theory. Lack of development is not a natural condition. Instead, one must pay attention to a country's initial pre and post-colonial conditions. Societies should be empowered to achieve political, economic and social development, not moulded or culturally divided into subjective groups, he said.

- Robin Higham (University of Ottawa) raised questions surrounding the definition of "progress" and expressed his concern about aligning the diverse cultures of the world with ours.

- Madonna Larbi (Match International Centre) said that it would be a grave mistake not to consider systemic barriers to development. In Peru, for instance, certain groups of people can not advance in their careers not because they have certain progress-resistant characteristics, but because they face systemic discrimination on the base of their colour.

"Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress"
Presentation and Discussion with Lawrence E. Harrison
List of Participants
October 6, 2000
Ottawa

Errol Mendes
Human Rights Research and Education Centre
University of Ottawa

Robin Higham
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Madonna Larbi
Match International Centre

Kathy Berg
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Maureen Ward
Canadian Museum of Civilization

Pierrette Amiot-Herbiet
Canadian Museum of Civilization

Josette Couture
International Relations
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Heather de Santis
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Debra Davis
Public Affairs
Canadian High Commission in the UK

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Head of Policy Planning
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John McDowell
Director
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Patrick Riel
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Media Relations Office
DFAIT

Luc Santerre
Acting Director
Arts and Cultural Industries Promotion
DFAIT

Jill Sinclair
Director General
Global and Human Issues Bureau
DFAIT

Bonny Berger
Trade Commissioner
Communications, Culture and Policy Planning
DFAIT

Steven Lee (Chair)
Executive Director
Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

Marketa Geisler (Rapporteur)
Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development